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## JOHN R. FENN.

ADÈLE B. LOOSCAN.

In a history of Fort Bend County recently published by J. A. Sowell are recorded many interesting incidents in the life of John R. Fenn, one of the old settlers of that county, and a grandson of one of the oldest settlers in the State of Texas.

The Fenn family on both sides were from Savannah, Georgia, but John R. Fenn was born in Lawrence County, Mississippi, on October 11, 1824. David Fitzgerald, his maternal grandfather, came to Texas in 1822, when the country was an unbroken wilderness, and the place settled by him and his son, John Fitzgerald, three miles below the present town of Richmond, on the Brazos River, was one of the first to be opened in Austin's Colony. In 1832 Eli Fenn, who had married Sarah, the daughter of David Fitzgerald, visited Texas, and being well pleased with the country, returned the next year, bringing with him his family, whom he had left in Madison County, Mississippi. They first settled on the Fitzgerald place, where crops were raised in 1834 and 1835. The one planted in 1836 was lost on account of the Mexican invasion.

At the time of this event, John R. Fenn, the son of Eli Fenn, was between eleven and twelve years old, and the account of his capture by the invading Mexican army is most interesting.

His recollection of the stirring events of his boyhood, in many of which he participated, and of the adventures of older members of his family with the Karankawa and Bedi<sup>1</sup> Indians, reveal striking pictures of frontier life in Texas.

His father, Eli Fenn, served in the army of the Texas revolution in Captain Wiley Martin's company, and when, in 1842, a force was organized under Gen. Alexander Somerville for the invasion of Mexico, John R. Fenn, although not yet of age, joined the company

<sup>1</sup>In Spanish manuscripts probably the most usual spelling of this name is Vidais, though it is spelled in various other ways, as Beedi, Bedais, Vedais, etc.

of Captain William Ryan, of Fort Bend County. Later this expedition went to pieces on the Rio Grande, a part returning to Texas with Somerville, and the others crossing over into Mexico. John Fenn, through the influence of Robert Herndon, joined with the former band, and thus escaped the horrors of the captivity and decimation, which have made the term "Mier prisoners" suggestive of all the suffering that humanity is capable of enduring.

In 1852 John R. Fenn married Miss Rebecca M. Williams. She was born in Wilkinson County, Mississippi, and came to Texas with her parents in 1845, settling on Oyster Creek, one and a half miles from Clear Lake, in Brazoria County. Mrs. Fenn's ancestors were distinguished in the war of the American Revolution. One great-grandfather, General Nathaniel Randolph, served on the staff of General Lafayette, and Ezekiel Ayers, another great-grandfather, served with equal honor in another branch of the colonial army. The grandfather, Isaac Williams, was for some time colonial governor of the province of Mississippi.

After their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Fenn also settled on Oyster Creek, on the Thomas Barnett League. For many years past Houston has been regarded as their place of residence, but there was also a home maintained on the old plantation, where they entered upon life together, where he always retained supervision over his plantation affairs, and where, at his request, he was laid away when his period of life ended.

Mr. and Mrs. Fenn early became members of the Texas Veterans' Association, attending nearly every meeting. He became first vice-president, and was always an active, useful member. Upon the organization of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas his wife was made president of San Jacinto Chapter, and, as an earnest worker for the preservation of the historic associations of the old Republic of Texas, was ably aided by his counsel. They were truly united in patriotic fervor, as in all the objects of life. In 1902 they celebrated their golden wedding at their home in Houston, and on that happy occasion there were gathered around them their two sons, Francis Marion Otis Fenn, and Joseph Johnson Fenn, with their wives and children; their daughters, Mary—with her husband James J. McKeever, Jr.—and Miss Belle Fenn; and numbers of loving friends.

On November 23, 1904, the family circle was broken, John R. Fenn then being called by the All Wise Father to leave the scenes of his eighty years of service on earth.

The last sad scenes are described by the *Houston Post* of November 25th, as follows:

As announced, the funeral services of Captain John R. Fenn were held at the family residence, 1117 Bell avenue, with Rev. William Hayne Leavell of the First Presbyterian church as officiating minister, at 9 o'clock a. m. yesterday. The floral tributes were many and beautiful.

A fragrant, snowy star, from the San Jacinto chapter, Daughters of the Republic of Texas, reposed upon the casket of the old Texas hero.

At the conclusion of the services at the home the family and friends drove to the depot, where at 10 o'clock, through the kindness of Mr. T. W. House, a special train was secured from Mr. Leroy Trice of the International and Great Northern railway to convey the funeral party to and from Duke, the railroad station of his ranch and plantation. Permission was kindly granted by the Sugarland Railway company to run this train over their track from Arcola Junction to Duke.

When the train arrived at Duke it was met by Mr. Fenn's friends and neighbors, who had gathered to pay the last honors to one they had known and esteemed so long. These friends had brought enough vehicles to accommodate the funeral party; the family carriage and driver having been sent overland from Houston for the widow to occupy in this last sad journey.

#### AFFECTING SCENE.

Before starting to the old family burying ground, where the mother of the deceased was buried years ago, a short halt was made and the casket carried into Mr. Fenn's house at Duke to permit the family servants and the plantation hands, some of whom have been in the family five generations, to gaze once more at the placid countenance of their sleeping master. It was an affecting sight to see these old darkies file by the casket in respectful silence, but with tears streaming down their faces as they passed out from the dearly loved presence of "old marse." There was also in this occasion the widow's brother, Mr. Edwin J. Williams, and Judge W. P. Hamblen, who were present at the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Fenn in 1852, and also attended their golden wedding celebration in 1902.

Arriving at the appointed spot, a short service of reading and prayer was conducted by Dr. Leavell, after which loving hands cov-

ered the earth with flowers, and left the mortal remains of John R. Fenn laid to rest beneath the tall live oak trees, with their waving streamers of gray moss, and amidst the scenes he loved so dearly in life, and where so many busy years had passed. After the last sad rites were concluded the family and friends returned to the city on the special train, arriving at about 3:45 p. m.

It can be truthfully said that he sleeps beneath a canopy of flowers upon a tract of land granted to his forefather, David Fitzgerald, by the Spanish government in 1822. David Fitzgerald was one of Stephen F. Austin's colony of the Old Three Hundred.

Captain Fenn's father, Eli Fenn, was also one of the Old Three Hundred, and his son, constituting the families represented, was the last survivor of this old, historic settlement.

#### THE PALLBEARERS.

The following gentlemen acted as pallbearers: Honorary, T. W. House, Captain William Christian, Judge W. P. Hamblen, Captain J. C. Hutcheson, Dr. Max Urwitz, A. C. Herndon, Captain R. G. Ashe, Captain S. Taliaferro, John W. Bell, Captain J. S. Rice, James Bute, Captain D. D. Peden; active, W. B. King, Alex Bergamini, Pierce Geiselman, Dr. E. J. Hamilton, Jo F. Meyer, Nat Ewing.